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## NEW DOUBT RAISED ON RESPONSIBILITY

### Administration's Account of Involvement in Operation Is Widely Challenged

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WASHINGTON, Nov. 25 — The Reagan Administration's assertions that Israel made unauthorized arms shipments to Iran and that only two officials in Government knew that money was being diverted to the Nicaraguan rebels were immediately challenged today by knowledgeable officials, intelligence experts and members of Congress.

Sources familiar with Iran arms dealings disclosed that Israel's 1985 arms shipments were flown to Iran by a company with close links to the Central Intelligence Agency. Later that year — before the Administration acknowledged any role in the Israeli shipments — American and Israeli officials met to negotiate the price to be paid by Jerusalem for replacing missiles sent to Iran, these sources said.

Attorney General Edwin Meese 3d said diversion of funds to the Nicaraguan rebels, known as contras, had been uncovered by Justice Department officials who had gleaned clues from documents and "intercepts." This raised the question of whether the various intelligence agencies had any prior knowledge of the secret financing of the contras. "To the best of our knowledge, no one in the C.I.A. knew anything about it," said Mr. Meese of the diversion of money to the Nicaraguan rebels.

When Congress first raised questions about a possible Administration role in supplying the Nicaraguan rebels, Elliott Abrams, the Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs, told a secret Congressional hearing that the C.I.A. had deliberately avoided collecting information on the Americans involved overseas in the contra operation. Mr. Abrams cited prohibitions against gathering intelligence on Americans.

#### Explanation Is Questioned

But a Congressional official raised questions at the time about why the agency had chosen to know so little about how the contras were raising money and supplying themselves. "In the intelligence business," this official observed, "you don't ask questions about things you don't want to know."

Mr. Meese, in discussing the 1985 Israeli shipments to Iran, said that a September delivery had not been authorized by the American Government.

"To my knowledge, nobody authorized that particular shipment," said Mr. Meese. He said Mr. Reagan learned of this shipment in early fall 1985 and was told in February of 1986 of a November 1985 Israeli shipment that was subsequently returned by the Iranians to Israel.

Two sources knowledgeable about the Israeli shipments said the first delivery had been carried by International Air Tours Ltd., a Nigerian company based in Brussels. These sources identified International Air Tours as a C.I.A. "proprietary," one owned by the agency. Such companies are set up by intelligence agencies to carry out covert operations. They also do routine, nongovernment business as a cover.

"Proprietaries" are required to keep records of every operation they undertake. According to Congressional sources, William J. Casey, the Director of Central Intelligence, told the Senate Intelligence Committee last week in a secret briefing that the agency had no records of any shipments for Israel by International Air Tours.